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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004205

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS I2

SUBJECT: SCIRI LEADERS BEMOAN LACK OF STRONG SUNNI PARTNERS  
IN IRAQI GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Abdulaziz al-Hakim, Chairman of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi (also from SCIRI) told National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley and Ambassador Khalilzad that the Sunnis were the weak link in Iraq's national unity government. Efforts to bring the Sunnis into the political process, they argued, had not stopped the violence, and Sunni political leaders did not appear to have the support of the street. Hadley assured al-Hakim and Abdel Mehdi that efforts to build Sunni support for the national unity government did not come at the expense of the Shi'a and Kurds and argued that Iraq needs moderate Shi'a and Sunnis to stand together in opposing those who undermine the political process. END SUMMARY.

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Agreeing on the Enemy  
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¶12. (C) NSA Hadley opened the October 30 meeting by reaffirming President Bush's support for Iraq's unity government and the Iraqi people's struggle to establish a stable democracy. Al-Hakim thanked Hadley and agreed that the Iraqi people had made great strides by building a government based on popular support and a constitution, a novelty in the region. Yet, he acknowledged, Iraq faced a variety of problems, and to resolve them it is imperative to realize that the true enemies are Saddamists and Takfiris. "They are the enemy," he continued. "Everything else is a challenge." Hadley noted that President Bush paid close attention to this debate and recognized that part of al-Qaida's strategy was to cause sectarian violence by perpetrating damaging attacks on the Shi'a.

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Seeking Sunni Partners in Government  
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¶13. (C) Al-Hakim then turned to the participation of Sunni Arabs in Iraq's government, which he characterized as one of the most important challenges. He noted that the Shi'a "from day one" insisted in Sunni participation in all branches of the government and tried to work with the Sunnis using the principal of consensus. "But we are giving without receiving," he continued, pointing to the regions formation bill as an example of Sunni politicians withdrawing from agreements they had made with their Shi'a colleagues. This lack of steadfastness weakened the government, al-Hakim argued, and the fact that some Sunni participants in government thought of Shi'a as infidels made for even greater distrust.

¶14. (C) Abdel Mehdi continued in the same vein, noting that

Sunni participation was important but claiming that the process of bringing Sunnis into the government had led to an increase in violence. "Once a Sunni politician enters the government," he opined, "he loses his support in the street."

Abdel Mehdi noted that a number of current priorities of U.S. diplomacy in Iraq, such as achieving a fair distribution of resources and revising the de-Baathification process, were also Sunni priorities. He cautioned that other Iraqis might perceive that the US was trying to achieve Sunni participation at their expense. Hadley reiterated that President Bush supported the Iraqi government precisely because it resulted from a process in which over 12 million Iraqis voted. As the majority, the Shi'a have a central role to play, Hadley continued, and the US wants to strengthen its relationship with SCIRI and other Shi'a groups. Yet he cautioned that democracy does not end with majority rule, but must allow representation of all political groups and protect minority and human rights.

Hadley argued that moderate Sunni and Shi'a needed to join forces to oppose extremists, be they Sunni or Shi'a, who undermine the political process. Abdel Mehdi said that the Shi'a were trying this strategy, but that Sunni politicians still saw attacks on Sunni terrorists as a "personal vendetta" against Sunnis.

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Other Challenges  
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¶15. (C) Al-Hakim touched on several other challenges, including the interference of neighboring countries, the difficulties of reconstruction and service provision even in stable areas, and the militias (many of which could have been dealt with by implementation of CPA Order 91, he argued). He also pointed to lack of clarity in roles and authorities as

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an important problem. "Who has the authority to make decisions?" he asked. "The Prime Minister says he does not, that it is the Council of Ministers. They say no, it is the Policy Council for National Security or the Embassy." Hadley replied that the US sought to empower Iraqis to take more responsibility and, based on a discussion between President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki, would participate in a joint committee to determine how to accelerate training of Iraqi security forces to make sure that they were capable of succeeding.

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Visiting the US  
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¶16. (C) Hadley noted that President Bush was looking forward to receiving al-Hakim on December 4. Al-Hakim replied that he was honored by the invitation and looked forward to meeting the President on that day, God willing.

KHALILZAD